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Stamas Urges Federal Officials to Work with State on Mineral and Surface Rights Issues

Resolutions are a Result of Mason Tract Drilling Proposal

LANSING – As state and federal officials are currently considering a proposal to drill for oil and gas beneath the Mason Tract in Crawford County, Sen. Tony Stamas (R-Midland) introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution 35 yesterday, urging the departments and agencies involved to work together when dealing with surface and mineral rights issues.

“It is clear that this drilling was not the purpose Mr. Mason had in mind when he set aside property for our state. By having the mineral and surface rights divided, it makes it all the more difficult for us to protect this pristine piece of land,” Stamas said. “We must make sure Michigan’s citizens have the strongest voice possible when it comes to conserving our natural resources.”

The announcement of plans to drill for oil and gas near the AuSable River has generated widespread concern. The plans call for directional drilling on federal land adjacent to the Mason Tract in order to gain access to minerals (beneath the parcel of land in the Huron Manistee National Forest) leased to Savoy Energy Company by the DNR. This land had previously been donated to the state with the condition it remain safe from development.

Residents who consider the Mason Tract to be a pristine area that should be preserved from the impacts of drilling have expressed concern about the possible negative impact on one of the last remaining near-wilderness areas in the Lower Peninsula. In addition, outdoor sports groups feel certain activities involved with drilling could be harmful to one of Michigan’s most cherished fishing areas.

Michigan has jurisdiction over both mineral and surface rights on 3.8 million acres of land and mineral rights alone on another 2.1 million acres.

(More)

“The situation of surface land ownership differing from mineral rights ownership makes it difficult to protect land from development and at the same time difficult to extract the energy our society needs,” Stamas said. “It would be more productive for the state and federal governments to work cooperatively to do all that is possible to minimize conflicts in ownership between surface and mineral rights.”

Senate Concurrent Resolution 35 and Senate Resolution 171, introduced by the Chair of the Senate Committee on Technology and Energy, Sen. Bruce Patterson (R-Canton), urges Congress, the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Forest Service, and the Department of Energy to work with Michigan officials to exchange property where appropriate to align the ownership of mineral and surface rights on state and federal lands in Michigan.

Both resolutions have been referred to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs.